



31 Days to a Heart of Hospitality



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Day 1 What Hospitality is Not

“Hospitality is a personal response to your own need to connect with other people. This need is at the core of what it means to be human. Your entire humanity, your identity itself, is wrapped up in your need to connect. The real question is not how dangerous the stranger is. The real question is how dangerous will I become if I don’t learn to be more open.”



This series on hospitality has been growing inside my heart for a lifetime.

Because really, isn't it the ache of every human heart---to be known, to be loved?
But we have exchanged the riches of the word for something shallow and meaningless.

Hospitality is not a perfect Martha Stewart table setting.

It is not the smell of homemade bread, the clank of the right wine glasses, or the beauty of fresh flowers on the nightstand----as wonderful as those things are.

It is not, in fact, even, the gathering of a [few perfect strangers into your home to share fellowship and food.](#)

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You can have all those things and more and still miss hospitality.

Because true hospitality is born in the heart.

We learn it from our Father, who takes us into His own family, [washes us clean in the waters of Baptism](#) and gives us a robe of righteousness. He prepares a feast for us every Sunday at His table where He feeds us on the true body of blood of Himself, giving us life, forgiveness and salvation. He gives all this freely and makes us His own sons and daughters.

After we've feasted on His riches, He says, *go do likewise*.

Love your neighbor as yourself. Feed him, give him drink, clothe him and welcome him into your heart.

But we are also the sons and daughters of Adam.

And when we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves, He welcomes us again to His table, to forgive us and feed us so that we will slowly but surely be strengthened in the faith to love as He loves.

Hospitality is at the core of who we are, as humans and especially as Christians.

It is desire of our Father's heart.

May it become our desire too.

*Unless otherwise specified, the quotes I use will be from the book **Radical Hospitality**.*

We will answer the question, 'What is hospitality' and we will delve deep into what it really means to be open and vulnerable to others---to truly welcome them into your life.

On the fun side, I'll be sharing recipes and practical tips for making others feel welcome and at home.

*I can't think of a better way to spend this time with **you**, talking about **this**. And it seemed like the perfect follow up from last years' series about our [house rebuild](#) after our [fire](#).*

Day 2 Every Life is Sacred

We take a radical position when we insist that it all does matter. Life is holy ground.

Every Sunday at my church, we start our service by confessing that 'we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves'. Every single Sunday I can think of specific instances in my own life where this confession nails me to the wall. And my worst grievances are against the very ones I love the most.

Perhaps part of the reason we so mistreat our neighbor is our failure to recognize who he is.

We keep our hearts and our doors locked up tight because we have failed to see the image of God in the eyes of the stranger or even in the eyes of our own children, at times.

We march through life using people for gain, trampling on their hearts, or worse yet, ignoring them altogether.

We have forgotten that this is life and death.

These relationships where we live our lives are holy ground. And it matters immensely how I tread on this soil.

When we are in the presence of others, we are in the presence of Christ himself.

True hospitality sees the neighbor without all the distinctions. He is not white or black, gay or straight, rich or poor. He is the image bearer of God and we must honor him with all the love and respect with which we would honor the very presence of Christ in our midst.

He is holy ground and if we will open ourselves to him, we will never be the same—**because true hospitality is transforming.**

It is not political correctness.

It is not social grace.

And it is most certainly not mere tolerance.

It is an openness to know and love our neighbor that can only come from Love incarnate—from the One who so wanted to know us that He crawled into our skin and became a man.

The one who so loved us that He drug Himself, half-dead to a cross to die for us.

His hospitality toward us wasn't an afterthought or a means to impress others.

His hospitality was dangerous. *Holy ground always is.*

But He came right into our Hell and broke down every barrier to get to us.

He gave no thought to what it would cost Him.

Yet, we spend our entire lives building those walls back in a desperate effort to protect ourselves, to hide our secret sins, and to guard ourselves from heartache.

May He tear it all down and expose us and make us vulnerable. May He jar us awake from our selfish slumber so that we learn to see His children through His eyes and may He forgive us for every time we fail.

And tomorrow, when we meet our neighbor, may we see him with the fresh eyes of wonder and treat Him with honor—not for *who* he is but for *whose* he is.

“We catch a glimpse of each other, we sense the smell of God, and although we rush away from the holiest of moments, we are utterly changed. Life slams us into God.....and we realize that behind all the ordinary stuff there is something more dazzling and real than we can understand. Life is holy ground.”

Day 3 We Need Each Other



“Hospitality is a lively, courageous, convivial way of living that challenges our compulsion either to turn away or to turn inward and disconnect ourselves from others.”

Our rugged American individualism hasn't done us any favors where hospitality is concerned. Combine that with our obsession with electronics and you have, perhaps, the loneliest group of people that have ever lived.

We are desperately lonely.

To fight off that desperation, we fill our schedules to overflowing. “Maybe if I cram in one more thing, the ache will go away.” At least I won’t be alone in my loneliness.

When that doesn’t work, we settle for the company of screens—our phones and iPads and computers.

We hide behind our schedules and all our gadgets so much that we don’t even really see each other anymore.

Occasionally, when a crisis hits, we are jarred awake to our need for others but for most of our lives, we live in blurry state of self-sufficiency and self-absorption.

But, we were never meant for this modern isolationism.

Hospitality has its roots in the ancient world, where caring for strangers was a matter of life and death. They were keenly aware of their need for each other and it was a matter of survival.

Our modern conveniences have tricked us into thinking we can do this alone. But the deep ache in our hearts tells us another story.

We are all pilgrims on the same journey and it’s as if we are walking on the same path but ignoring each other. We don’t see our neighbor’s needs or even our own for that matter because we’ve so numbed and distracted ourselves. Stop and look around. People are hurting. They are lonely and despairing. *They need someone who sees them.* They need a kind word, a good deed. And the truth is, so do we.

In our haste and distraction, we’ve stopped looking at each other.

Do you remember the last person you actually looked in the eyes? I have to really think on that one. Did I even come face to face with my own children today?

We are not rugged individualists at our core. We are vulnerable, lonely people who NEED each other.

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And not only have we stopped caring for each other, *we've stopped seeing each other.*

Hospitality, in the truest sense, is our need to be known and loved—to really be seen.

It is not primarily the opening of our homes but the opening of our hearts to receive others.
To really receive them.

We cannot learn to be gracious until we learn to be available.

We cannot learn to be available to someone we won't even acknowledge.

It's not so much food we need from each other but love and kindness.

This kind of hospitality doesn't require a perfectly ordered guest room or a gourmet meal; it requires an open heart, a heart willing to really see someone else and welcome him.

Today's challenge::: Put down your gadget and really look at the people in your life. *Look right into their eyes.* Acknowledge that this is a person who you need and who needs you.

This is the face of God in your life today—this is the antidote for our collective loneliness.

We need each other. Don't go it alone.

Day 4 Making Room for Others



We talked a little about what hospitality is and what it is not.

We've even conceded that we need each other.

But hospitality doesn't come just because you have a better understanding of what it is.

Hospitality follows closely behind its friend, humility.

C.S. Lewis gave the best definition of humility I've heard when he said, "**Humility is not thinking less of yourself but thinking of yourself less.**"

And that may be our biggest barrier to hospitality.

We are so full of ourselves that there's no room to welcome anyone else.

Our thoughts are so consumed by all the details of our own selfish lives that we're not even that curious about other people.

Humility takes the stance, "I don't know you or understand you but I'm willing to empty my heart just a little of myself and welcome you in."

We come to relationships and even to strangers with such an agenda. We need them to like us, to do something for us, to make us feel a certain way.

When it comes right down to it, we manipulate the majority of the people in our lives to do what we want them to do.

When is the last time you came to a relationship, emptied of yourself, without your own agenda, and sought to know the other person and find out their need?

Wouldn't our marriages be different if we weren't always trying to get our way?

It's called putting yourself in someone else's shoes—living in their skin.

And that is the very humility and love that Christ demonstrates toward us. He is humility, in the flesh.

"He emptied Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross."

I despair this morning that I'm so full of self, that I come to every single relationship ready to plow my way through my own agenda.

But Christ has made the perfect exchange.

He takes on my pride and gives me His humility.

He takes on my lies and gives me His truth.

He takes my sin, death and darkness and gives me life and salvation.

We wear His humility and we get a glimpse of what it's like to walk a mile in someone else's shoes.

Hospitality is learning to live toward others with His borrowed love, in His perfect humility.

He gives us what we don't have in exchange for what He has, *in abundance*.

Lord, give us Your humility, teach us to give ourselves to others and forgive our stubborn selfishness.

Here's a few practical tips on making room for others. It won't feel natural at first. It'll seem contrived. But keep at it and you'll see your heart grow and change.

1. Pray specifically that Christ help you see others through His eyes.
2. When you encounter someone today, ask them a few questions about themselves. I have a friend that is so good at this. She is naturally curious about people and makes you feel like your life is so interesting. You could talk to her for an hour and she'd never once turn the conversation to herself. But be aware how quickly we all turn things back to our own lives, our own agenda. This takes practice and once you become conscious of it, you'll see what I mean.
3. Let yourself linger with thoughts of that person. What must his life be like? What are his struggles? Is there any way I could help or be of some encouragement?
4. Practice the same skills with your family. You won't make a ten year old any happier than by really listening, asking questions and being interested in what they're doing.

Try it, with your own family, your coworkers, a perfect stranger and see if you don't find that it's not that hard to make room for others.

Pretty soon, you'll have spaces in your heart that are emptied of self and ready to meet others.

And that space you make, for another, is the beginning of hospitality.

Day 5 Winter in My Heart



When my house burned to the ground in December of 2010, I found myself in desperate need of someone to show hospitality to me.

I needed somewhere to sleep and I needed someone to find clothes for me to wear.

I needed someone to listen to my gut wrenching cries and tell me that light would shine again.

I had nothing to give. All I could do was sob.

Some seasons are like winter in your heart.

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It's during those times that you learn how to live in the skin of someone in need.
It's then that you learn to cling to the only Hope there is.

Don't despise the winter grace.

It's then that you learn the blessedness of poverty and despair.

When someone else feeds your hungry soul, you learn to recognize those who starve.

God is leading you through this deep and wretched valley to make you blessed.

And when He brings you out again, you will see your brother with new eyes.

Your suffering will have made you perfectly fit to pour out your life him.

Day 6 The Barriers

“Brave hearts shine with the divine presence; like God they are free, they are welcoming and accepting, they are strong yet gentle. They are wondrously available.”



You have all the same excuses for not opening yourself to others as I do.

You're busy. You don't have the skill set. Their problems are too much. Their life is a mess. Your life is a mess. You're too impatient. You're not kind enough. You don't even like them. You have nothing to offer. What does it really matter?

Turns out, in the end, it's all that really matters.

All that other stuff we spend most of our lives doing—that's what doesn't matter. Trust me, I'm the queen of meaningless minutiae.

But those people that we pass by everyday, that we discard, that we overlook, that we disdain, that we can't stand, that we don't get—those people need us and we need them.

So let's call the problem what it is.

We are selfish, prejudice, self-centered, arrogant, and desperately afraid.

We are afraid that we'll be exposed for what we really are. We are afraid of rejection. We fear people who aren't like us. We are too self-absorbed to be bothered.

And if those are not your barriers to making yourself available to others, you know what yours are.

We're all in the same sinking ship.

But here's one thing that is true. You can spend your whole life hiding behind possessions and gadgets and busy-ness and fear and you will never know the joy of true relationship. Opening yourself to others is dangerous.

Yes, it will break your heart.

Yes, it will be messy and terrifying.

Yes, you will be broken and humbled and changed.

But the alternative is a mediocre loneliness that will eventually smother you to death.

Open your heart and live.

Your willingness to be alive and vulnerable will welcome others to do the same.

When you extend your heart to someone, you are, in bravery, extending them a lifeline.

Be brave. Step into the light. Someone's life is hanging in the balance. And the irony is—it may be yours.

Day 7 Solitude



We often have nothing to give others because we are bankrupt.

The irony is that we haven't learned to help others because we haven't learned to help ourselves.

Solitude is how we help ourselves.

It is in solitude that we develop a rich inner life that sustains us and spills over into the lives of others.

In Radical Hospitality, Pratt says:

“When we are alone, we have cut off our normal routes to escaping ourselves. Not only that, solitude hacks off most of the usual ways we feel affirmed. In solitude, we cease being competent workers. We do not serve or nurture others in solitude, and we seldom talk. Once amputated from these normal support systems, we discover a throbbing restlessness that begins to surface. Ancient wounds to the psyche begin ascending into the conscious region of the mind.

They float up like long dead bodies. Illusions shatter around us and wisdom gets a chance to get hold of us.”

Most of us are scared to death of solitude. We know that our demons linger there. We are haunted by the truth about ourselves and solitude threatens to expose us.

But if you can stay with solitude long enough to get past the initial pangs of emptiness and helplessness, you will find a beauty and strength there that cannot be possessed in any other way.

Your demons aren't that scary when exposed to the light of day. The emptiness is a God-given longing for home, for Him. **He is in the solitude.** It's His face we find there and it's there where we come to truly cherish this life, these relationships.

Learning to be alone is a spiritual discipline. It takes practice. And it's become nearly impossible in our modern world full of chaos and distractions.

Pratt says, in her book **Radical Hospitality**,

“We possess inward solitude at a very high cost. It does not come easily. In solitude, we feel helpless and almost out of control. We have grown dependent on others and the noises we make at each other. We do not even know how to imagine our lives without the bustle.”

The problem is, most of us moderns have neither solitude nor true relationship. We live our lives in the murky middle, where it's comfortable and doesn't cost us anything.

But true relationship and solitude both require us to be fully present, fully alive to both our fears and our deepest vulnerabilities.

I like to call it living on the dangerous edge of life----where joy is possible----but so is falling.

You can stay in your comfort zone and miss the danger.

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Or you can enter the wild abundant life that awaits just on the other side of solitude.

The riches you will discover there will lead you to a life that naturally overflows to your neighbor and meets his need without you even trying.

Solitude breeds hospitality. In silence, true conversation is born. Out of my emptiness and heartache, I see how desperately I need others.

And falling is finally the least of my worries.

When all else around me is quiet, I can finally hear His voice.

Only then do I have something worth sharing.

Day 8 Why All the Fuss?



Y'all have been so patient!

I know you were thinking that surely a series on hospitality would be full of recipes, model guest bedrooms and perfect table settings.

It's coming. Hang on!

I started this series where all true hospitality begins—***in our hearts.***

And before I move on to all the fun stuff, I want to pause to consider why any of it matters.

Why should I make room for others?

Why should I perfect a few recipes?

Why should I put some thought and effort into what goes into my guest bedroom?

What's the point?

The point is to serve others.

Don't miss it! Let it sink in.

That and only that should be my guiding principle.

So yes, we'll talk about kitchen and pantry organization. But not for the sake of perfectly aligned spices. Only as it helps to serve our family and neighbors.

We'll talk about cooking and why it's important to learn basic kitchen skills—but not so we can boast of being gourmet chefs.

We'll do those things that help us feed and serve our families and friends.

It's so easy to become obsessed with the perfect home, the most organized playroom, an heirloom tea set.



But what is our motive?

Are we spending our time and energy and money to impress others? Or to serve them?

We become slaves to our stuff instead of using what we have as a tool to serve those we love.

So, we won't encourage perfection. We will encourage service.

And, as the topics become more visual and practical, don't forget the goal:

To use our resources of time and treasure to love and serve our neighbors.

It's just that simple.

And just that impossible.

Join me in the crazy, beautiful paradox!

Day 9 Hospitality Begins in the Bedroom



From The Second Coming by William Butler Yeats

*Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.*

Don't worry. This is a family ebook. I'm keeping it on the up and up.

But really, I'm convinced that it all begins right here.

In this bed, in this room, with this relationship.

The very person you love the most is the hardest one to love sometimes.

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They often fall to last on our list. We cook the best meals and wear the best clothes for someone else.

We clean the house and use the best dishes *when company is coming*.

And it's time to reorder ourselves.

This person should come first---this person, with whom I share my bed and my struggle.

I should make it my business to know what he likes and what he doesn't.

I should make it my life's mission to serve him, above all others.

Wanna know why America is in such wretched shape? We've lost the order of things.

"Things fall apart," as the poet says. "The centre cannot hold."

We kill ourselves and spend our last dime to make our children rotten but we've forgotten that it all hinges on this bed, and our holding it sacred.

See him with new eyes and study him. How can you help him? How can you ease his burden? How can you make him laugh?

Stop keeping score and just love and serve him.

You know him best so this won't be hard for you.

Make him see that you hold this relationship in the highest regard.

Hospitality starts here. In this room. With this man.

The strength of our love for others depends on what happens here.

May *the centre hold* and may we *be full of 'passionate intensity.'*

Love him well.

The paradox is---the blessings that flow from this type of 'loving' will be greatest for you!

“I will love with urgency, but not with haste.” Mumford and Sons

Day 10 Hospitality in the Bedroom, part 2



Okay, since we've reordered of our affections toward our beloved, here's a few practical tips for making the bedroom more welcoming and sultry.

Declutter

Remove the treadmill. And the stack of clothes currently sitting on it. You know this was never a good idea, right? This sanctuary, this holy of holies (thank you, Laura! for the analogy) was never made for exercise equipment. It's just wrong. We've gone way too analytical and practical. This room is not made for practicality.

Read some poetry in here.

Play some **Mumford and Sons**. Or *Dance With Me* by **The Civil Wars**.

This room was made for love. Period. You know I'm right. And I know you're gonna hate me for this—but while you're at it, get rid of the t.v. too. This room was made for key *life-sustaining* activities. And watching television isn't one of them!

Infuse your Personality

If any room in your house should wreak with your personality, it should be this one. You can do this in so many simple ways. Put your jewelry or your scarves on display. Hang some art that inspires you. Paint it a romantic color. But somehow, in some way, make this room be a reflection of who you are and what you love. I violated all rules of wall hangings in my little corner but it makes me smile every single day. Of course my all-time personal favorite in the ‘make your room scream YOU’ category is the monogram. It’s my mission in life to have at least one in every room. That way, if you’re ever at my house and can’t remember my name, there will be little clues everywhere.

Now, don’t stress yourself out. Take baby steps. Make a [Pinterest board of inspiration](#) and then slowly but surely, infuse your bedroom with little parts of yourself.

Buy the Best Linens You Can Afford

Save your pennies and invest in good linens. You spend 1/3 of your life here in your bed. Don’t sleep on cheap, scratchy sheets. I’ve made a science of bed comforts. We use only feather pillows, we invested in a good mattress and I have the softest Italian sheets known to man. They were not cheap. But you can get great, high thread count sheets from Tuesday Morning and TJ Maxx for a fraction of the retail cost. It’s so worth the thought and effort you’ll put into it. Stevie and I HATE to travel because our bed and linens are like BUTTAH.

Invest in a Good Room Fragrance

I am so sensitive to smells. I can detect a sour scent a mile away. So, my house is full of home fragrances, mostly diffusers. There are certain ones I like for certain rooms but my favorite for the bedroom is Archipelago’s Havana. You can buy it here.



[Archipelago Botanicario de Havana 7.6...](#)

Archipelago Botani...

[Best Price \\$26.50](#)

or Buy New \$34.44

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I do still have some candles but due to family allergies, I don't use them very much. Good quality diffusers like this are so worth it because they put out a lot of fragrance and last forEVER. I've had the one in my bedroom for 6 months and it's not even 1/3 gone. You'll be addicted to this Havana scent! Just between you and me, I also spray a tiny little bit of my own perfume on the linens before I make up the bed. Did I mention I'm very influenced by smells? My favorite perfume is Tocca's Cleopatra. It is grown up and sophisticated and girly.



[Tocca Beauty Cleopatra Collection 1....](#)

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Okay, that's a good start for making the bedroom slightly sultry and seductive.

Day 11 Hospitality and Children



I think we are mistaken when we save our best efforts at hospitality for ‘company.’ And the subtle (or not so subtle) message that we communicate to those we love most is that they aren’t quite as important or deserving of our best. And what is that ‘best’ that we have to offer them? It’s a commitment to love them by discipling them.

Disciple means to teach. We are their first and most important teachers.

As modern Americans, we seem to have lost our way when it comes to our role in our children’s lives. We love them, of course, but we seem to have forsaken the role of being their primary mentors. In generations past, children were kept closer to home and were systematically taught the fundamental lessons in life at a much earlier age. They were expected to participate in the household economy by contributing in a meaningful way to family life. These days, as long as they’re ‘out of our hair’, we are happy and so are they. And trust me, as a homeschooler, the same thing can happen regardless of whether they’re with you all the time or not.

It’s hard to live with kids in a meaningful way. Some days, I give anything to send mine off somewhere, anywhere.

But the bottom line is this: parenting with intention is so difficult. Teaching your children how to live is a daunting task. It’s much easier to be a passive spectator and blame someone else for what’s

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wrong in our kids and families. Teaching and mentoring and discipling them well is a nearly impossible task. But the alternative is terrifying. Undisciplined, untrained, unloving and overindulged kids become adults. Welcome to every Walmart in America.

We're a mess.

And our only hope is to repent.

We must admit that we haven't been the parents we should have been. We've been lazy and apathetic. Or we've been too harsh and then overindulgent out of guilt. We have chosen our own comfort and our own pleasure at the expense of their proper training.

The next time your child does something you hate---and I know, because it happens to me all the time---take a careful look. It's probably some variation of your own sin and poor behavior.

And you hate it in them because you loathe it in yourself. But unless you're willing to do the hard thing and deal with your very own sin and struggle, you will never rightly deal with theirs.

You'll minimize them, or ignore them or worse yet, you'll overreact out of anger toward them.

Our children are like small mirrors that let us see plainly into our own corrupt hearts.

It's God's way of tenderly showing us our sin in a way that *just might* bring us to repentance.

But we are children of Adam and we're stubborn and hard-hearted. We don't give up easy and not usually without a fight. So, why are we surprised to see the same seed-bed of rebellion in our kids? They have learned it from the masters---you and I and every other adult in their lives.

The only answer I can find here is Christ.

We surrender to Him all our tired excuses, all our defenses, all our stubborn anger and rebellion and we beg Him to replace our stone heart with flesh.

*We beg Him to make **US** over first.*

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Then, we will be able to rightly pray for and teach our children about this cycle of repentance that we all must learn to live in, daily.

I wish there were a shortcut. I wish there were a formula for raising gracious, hospitable and kind children. The truth is---the path is ancient and well-worn but it's not easy. And it will require *everything* from you---the kind of sacrificial love that only comes from the supernatural grace of Christ. It looks like dying to self and rising to walk in His mercy and grace. And they will watch that cycle of dying and rising, of sin and repentance, and they will learn something beautiful about the rhythm of life as a child of God.

When they see Him dig out your rebellion and anger and false humility, they will know that this Christ that we serve is not a moralist or a goody two shoes or an angry God, out to get them.

They will see the living God, in the flesh of their parents.

His love will draw them and woo them and His powerful Word will transform them.

We want cheap, superficial, behavior modification for our children. Christ wants deep abiding peace and hope for them. We want little moralists who will always choose the politically correct path. Christ wants to circumcise their hearts and make them true disciples. We want them to fit in. He died to set them apart.

We think we love them. He really does.

And He loves them so much that He is not willing to leave them as He found them. He's so intentional about this transformation that He doesn't even leave it to us. He lived the sinless life, walked the narrow way, lived perfectly hospitable **in their stead**. And in ours. So that, ultimately, we have nothing left to do. We are free, now, to love our neighbor, because everything we need has been answered in Christ.

And when we learn to live from this gift, from this bounty, the teaching will become natural. Because we'll be giving to them from the surplus of love and joy in our own hearts.

And when we fail in this task---and yes, I said WHEN we fail, we seek refuge in the cycle of dying and rising, of sinning and repenting---to walk in newness of life. And those whom God has given to us to walk beside us will smile---not because they see perfect parents, but because they finally see the key to living in peace with others. And that key is forgiveness.

The forgiveness won for us on the cross and delivered to us in Word and Sacrament.

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So, how do you raise hospitable children?

You *teach*.

You teach them what you are learning by living a transparent life in front of them.

Jesus said, “Go make disciples, *by baptizing and teaching*.”

You teach them about Him. You teach the faith, once delivered to the saints. Give them His Word and bring them regularly to the Lord’s table, where they feast on the very Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world----even the sins of children and parents.

The thing about parenting that scares me to death is that our children usually turn out like us.

Lord, have mercy.

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Prayer for Children from the Lutheran prayer book:

With joy and thanksgiving, we praise You out of the fullness of our grateful hearts that You have gladdened our home and life with these children.

We know that they are a gift of Your bountiful hand. Grant us grace and wisdom to bring up these precious souls in the knowledge and understanding of Your Word, which makes us wise unto salvation. Watch over them with Your tenderest care and continued grace until the day we bring them to Holy Baptism.

As surely as You will endow them with faith and strengthen them in spirit, so too give them healthy bodies and strengthen and preserve them according to Your good and gracious will. Grant that they may grow in favor with you and bring sunshine and joy into our hearts and our home.

Keep us all in Your grace, forgiving us daily our sins and filling our souls with peace. You are our hiding place. And now to You be praise, glory and thanksgiving, for the precious gift, this day, and forever, through Jesus Christ, who is the friend of children, and Savior of all. Amen.

Day 12 The Well-Appointed Guest Room



Let me start out this post by saying that everything I ever learned about making a guest room comfortable, I learned from my friend, Susan. As a matter of fact, almost everything I learned about everything was from her. She is the essence of Southern hospitality and I hope to be just like her when I grow up. Because of her stellar example, I've gotten much more intentional over the years about my guest spaces.

Here's my list of the top ten items that every well-appointed guest room should have. This is the ultimate goal but collect things here and there as you can, within your budget. I mostly

‘shop the house’ when I’m having company. I mosey around my rooms and look for pretty and cozy things to add to the guest room to make it more inviting and comfortable. Sometimes they make it back to their rightful homes and sometimes they become permanently attached to the guest room. Look around and see what you have a first and then do some shopping if need be.

1. A comfortable bed.

Most of us can’t afford to buy a high quality mattress for the guest room so I’m a huge fan of a thick mattress pad on the bed to make it more inviting. It’s often hard to sleep in a strange place and an uncomfortable bed only adds to the difficulty. They’re not that expensive and make a huge difference in comfort. Those high thread count sheets from Tuesday Morning come in handy here too!



2. Extra pillows

I try to store 2-3 extra pillows in the guest room closet. Good, feather pillows! Don’t skimp on pillows! Your guests will thank you!

3. Fresh towels and washcloths.

I like crisp white towels for company and I will often buy a couple new ones when company's coming. It's a fairly cheap way to freshen up a room and who doesn't need a few more white towels? One of my very smart blog readers recommended a black washcloth for women to use to remove makeup. Genius, I tell you!

4. A luggage rack

I'm completely in love with luggage racks. They're so practical and vintage, all at the same time. You can often find them at antique stores but some retail stores still sell them. Trust me, get one. You'll wonder how you ever lived without it. Or your guests will.



5. A cozy throw

I don't know about you but I use throws ALL.THE.TIME. Every room needs a throw. I'm looking around and can see three in my living room at the moment. I'm a throw-hoarder, among other things. TJ Maxx has great ones on the cheap and you can find them in great colors and patterns. They are cheap, instant style. My black and white striped one was less than twenty bucks from IKEA.

6. Fresh flowers

If I don't have time to pick up flowers and there's nothing blooming in my yard, I'll snip a fresh magnolia leaf or something from outside. I think more than anything, this tells your guest that you were thinking of them before hand—that you care—that they are important. Fresh flowers add instant life and beauty to a room and make everyone smile.

7. Water pitcher

There's nothing wrong with handing your guest a water bottle but a pretty water pitcher and a piece of beautiful glassware add such a nice touch. Almost all my glassware is thrifted and I'm always on the lookout for beautiful pieces. And this is where you don't need a whole set of



matching glasses. Next time you're thrifting, look for a few pieces for the guest room.

8. Stationary

I leave pens, pencils, paper, stationary and even stamps in my guest room. This comes in especially handy if your guest has trouble sleeping. Besides, writing hand-written notes is such a lost art! If you don't have a desk in your guest room, consider thrifting one and repainting it. Most people travel with electronics and it's nice to have a desk to work from. I've also been hoarding extra chargers to keep in my guest rooms, which has come in handy more than once already.

9. Books and Magazines

Decorating or art books, poetry, and books with essays are great to leave in your guest rooms. And I even change mine out depending on who's gonna be staying with me. I try to think of who I'm entertaining and then put a few books and current magazines that match their interests. I just shop the house because heaven knows I have a book or two.



10. Snacks

I usually make sure there's some good chocolate, mints, cough drops etc. I just keep a drawer full of goodies and stock up when the goodies are on sale.

Bonus::

And for my guest room fragrance (and the one I use in my workroom/office!), I use Archipelago's Stonehenge diffuser. It's divine!



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And if your children just so happen to place a small lego man on the plate wall for fun, you should leave him. He can keep your guests company. Like a little guardian angel.

Day 13 The Well-Stocked Guest Bath



Remember this summer when we hosted 25 people at our house for the week of July 4th? I knew that with that many people (8 of them being our kids) we'd need well stocked bathrooms----so I went on a bathroom stocking spree. The great thing about stocking your bathrooms well is that when you need something, you can always shop the house before having to shop the store.

I like to start with great smelling soaps and lotions. I almost always shop at TJ Maxx because they have great brands at a fraction of the cost.

Inexpensive glass jars make great storage for cotton balls and Q-tips. I have these in all my bathrooms.

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I like to have either a basket well stocked with various toiletries that my guests might need. You could store the basket under the sink or on the counter if it's small enough. I also try to keep an extra robe in the guest bathrooms and plenty of towels and washcloths. It may seem redundant to stock things that *may* or may not be used but I'm always grabbing things from



these bathrooms until I get to the store to restock them.

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Here's a list of things I like to keep on hand for guests:

- extra toilet paper**
- paper towels**
- soaps and lotion**
- pads and tampons**
- toothbrush and toothpaste**
- motrin and tylenol**
- visine eye drops**
- extra contact cases and contact solution**
- bandaids and first aid creme**
- nail clippers and basic manicure set**
- deodorant**
- cotton balls and Qtips**
- body and face wash**
- chapstick**
- small sewing kit**

And last but not least, a **white terry robe**, which will make them feel like they're at the spa!

This list isn't exhaustive but it sure comes in handy to have the things you need without having to ask your host for every item you might have forgotten. I think it serves to give your guest some sense of control when they are out of their element and away from home. These items would be great to stock in travel sizes and to buy as you see them on sale.

Day 14 The Well Stocked Pantry

The alternate title is, "Hello, my name is Edie and I hoard chicken stock."



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I'm not saying I'm a hoarder but what I'm saying is—I like a well stocked pantry. My sister hoards paper products so it runs in the family. At this very moment, she's probably got 120 rolls of toilet paper. And I could be underestimating here.

But then, who am I to talk, I just bought a case of chicken stock and 14 cans of tomatoes. Don't turn us in. We're just trying to be hospitable!

Okay, drum roll please. I almost hate to tell you this because every time I tell someone about my chicken stock, they start hoarding it too and then I can't get it at my grocery store. Which is why I always buy all they have, be it a carton or a case. But this brand is amazing. It's better than homemade stock, in my humble opinion. It's dark and rich and full of tasty goodness. I use it ALL the time in almost everything I cook. I get very nervous when the stash gets low. If you ever wonder what to get me for Christmas, you can never go wrong with this chicken stock. Or something from Tiffany's. Either one is fine.



Add this to your grocery list, dear ones. Just please don't buy it from the East side Ingles.

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The day before BHG came to photograph our house for their magazine, my sister spent HOURS organizing my pantry. We started the process of moving some of my pantry items into containers with labels. We used the 'champignon' font at 200 pt and then just taped the labels to the front of the containers. I'd like to get most of my pasta, dried beans and rice into containers. Maybe by Thanksgiving. Or whenever she comes back 😊



There's one other item that I'm a brand Nazi about--the San Marzano tomatoes. So worth the extra cost. I use them in all my soups where tomatoes are a main player. I also like the fire roasted and use them when I don't use the San Marzano.



Here's a listing of the things I like to keep well stocked so that I'm prepared to cook for my family and friends. (I'm doing a whole separate post on baking so those items will be left off here.)

Kitchen Basics stock—chicken in bulk, a couple beef (I don't love the vegetable or seafood stock but you might!)

Tomatoes—28 oz cans of San Marzano and 14 oz cans of fire roasted

Canned Beans—black, pintos, garbanzos, cannellini, white northern, chili beans

Dried Beans—navy, pintos, lentils, black

Rice—I keep jasmine, brown rice, wild rice, long grain, risotto, quinoa.

Pasta—lasagna noodles, fusilli pasta (I use this for my lasagna soup), macaroni, orzo, spaghetti, angel hair, linguine

Soups—cream of chicken, cream of mushroom, cream of whatever's on sale, tomato,

Oils—I buy olive oil by the droves, in large containers, canola, peanut, coconut

Vinegars—red wine, balsamic, distilled, apple cider, rice wine

Sauces—chili sauce, Sriracha, cholula, Sweet Baby Ray's, Country Bob's, local honey!!!!, maple syrup, various hot sauces, every kind of mustard this side of the Atlantic

Peppers and Olives--chipotle peppers in adobe sauce, roasted red peppers, black olives, green olives, kalamata olives

Bread Crumbs—panko, regular and eye-talian

Jellies and Jars—pepper jelly, apricot, marmalade, pesto, jalapeños, pepperoncinis

Misc—canned artichokes, canned pumpkin

Peanut Butter—I have about 5 varieties of peanut butter. They're all good!

Nuts—Trader Joe's has a superb selection of nuts and we keep every kind imaginable on hand.

Dried Fruits--I always keep jumbo raisins, dried cranberries and dried Tart cherries for my cherry chocolate chip cookies!

Don't forget the onions, potatoes, garlic, and shallots.

There's no end to the yummy goodness that can be made and shared from a well stocked pantry. Buy in bulk and watch for sales, especially buy one, get one free.

With a well-stocked pantry, you eliminate the first road block to cooking. If you have things on hand, you're much less likely to give in to the temptation of eating out. Your family will be happy and well nourished with good, home-cooked meals.

Now, go forth and stock up, dear friends so you'll be ready to cook later, at the end of this book!

Day 15 The Beverage Center



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I've never had a beverage bar before but it's been on my wish list for a long time. So, when we were rebuilding our house, I decided to make it happen. And oh, am I glad I did. I've had friends in the past with this type of space, away from the hubbub of the kitchen and it works so well for flow of traffic and ease of entertaining a big family or lots of friends.

I actually changed the floor plan of the house to accommodate this awesome space. As you walk through this side door (coming in from the breezeway), the beverage center is to your right and the floor to ceiling open pantry is to your left. That's a peak of my bedroom at the end of the photo. The glass doors to the workroom are on either side of the beverage bar.

Did I mention I LOVE this space? If you ever have a chance to create a scullery/butler's pantry/beverage center, I would highly recommend it. Side note:: I love to put little love notes throughout the house to encourage a certain ***joy de vivre*** and to help us all remember to love and serve each other.

Katie Daisy's stuff is awesome!



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And don't we all need little reminders like this? Every morning when I make my coffee, I am reminded that my little ones need me to be kind and gentle. It's a good way to start the day, before the whirlwind of stress and work bear down. And it's amazing how far a little kindness and gentleness can go. I am always so amazed and touched by the kindness of others and it convicts me of my lack of it towards the people I love most. So, every little nudge in the right direction helps!

We did vertical plank board behind this wall for durability and architectural interest. It's so easy to wipe down and keep clean. I only wish I had covered more walls with wood!



I just recently set up a hot chocolate station. I have large glass jars full of hot chocolate and marshmallows and I find that the happiness factor goes up ten fold in your house when hot chocolate is readily accessible! With squirtable whipped cream, of course.

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Most of the glassware is thrifted. The colorful coffee mugs are from West Elm, as is the monogrammed amber stemware. The sign was a gift from our wonderful builder, Larry Anglea and his wife.



I keep cinnamon in my beloved Jadeite salt shaker to add to my coffee (thank you for the tip, Miss Patty!). We have this Philips Saeco RI9837/05 Syntia Automatic Espresso Machine, Stainless Steel and we LOVE it. This is our second espresso machine and I highly recommend this brand, if you're in the market for one. The coffee and espresso are divine and the frother works great. (Often the frothers are weak on these types of machines or don't last long, so definitely read reviews before you buy). It also dispenses hot water for hot chocolate and tea. The only problem is that I often become the barista when guests are here because nobody else knows how to use it. It's not quite as easy as making a pot of coffee. It's a good problem to have though and I've just about got my girls trained to use it.

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I keep the lower drawers stocked with extra coffee and tea, to-go cups for hot and cold drinks, packets of propel and crystal light and latte and cappuccino mixes. The to-go cups are a huge



hit and so worth stocking up on for the holidays. I keep spoons, stirrers and sweeteners where they're easily accessible, including local honey for the hot tea.





This may in fact be the most hardworking of all our rooms. It gets used all day, everyday. This space is just behind the kitchen so it definitely eases traffic jams in the kitchen. The traffic jams are all in here, though! In fact, I wish I could have made it twice as wide!

We designed this space specifically for the U-Line ice machine which we use all the time but especially in the summer when we're filling up coolers.

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I am SO THANKFUL for this little corner of our house. It is the very essence of hospitality and I think it's a crying shame that the butler's pantry got tossed aside right along with the butler, after the revolution of the 60's.

We should start a 'bring back the butler's pantry' revolution. Heck, we should start a 'bring back the butler' revolution.

THAT's what I really need. A butler to man the butler's pantry. Any takers?

The question everyone asks about the open shelves is, "Doesn't everything get dusty?" Not at the rate we use it!

Inspiration for the shelf style from Urban Grace Interiors.

Cabinet color: Benjamin Moore Great Barrington Green.

This room functions as a side entry as well so I added a cheerful yellow mirror! It makes me smile every day.



Day 16 How to set up a baking center



I've never quite had a baking center like this but it was a priority when we rebuilt our house. I've had various versions of one for a long time and here's the truth of the matter—if your supplies are easily accessible and organized, you'll bake more.

The flour and sugar that are sitting on my counter are practically begging me to bake something. AND, I never run out of stuff because I always know when I need it. And it's possible I hoard baking supplies too. But, let's look on the bright side, there's always flour.

So, it's worth the effort to think through your spaces and see where you could incorporate and organize your supplies. Here's my advice.

1. Put your highly used items in pretty containers.

I love these glass jars from Walmart and I used the *champignon* font at 200 pt to print off the labels onto plain white paper and then I use packing tape (wide) to tape the labels onto the jars. It's so simple and though I keep thinking I'll order real labels someday, these work

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perfect and I'll probably never get around to ordering anything official. I store flour, sugar, brown sugar, and powdered sugar like this.



2. Store them on the counter if you can.

I have open shelving for a reason. Life is too short to repeatedly get things out of the cabinet. Can I get an amen? Open and closing doors a hundred times a day makes me crazy. So I eliminate that step so that there are no barriers to cooking for me. I never think to myself, "Should I drag all that stuff out to make homemade bread?" It's all *out* ready to be used. It's as if I'm making my kitchen stand at attention and be on the ready to work. I love spaces that are pretty but work hard. You're not just another pretty face, Queen Kitchen. You've gotta earn your keep around here. And my family benefits because there's lots of homemade food.



3. Keep all your baking utensils handy and organized.

The top drawer below my mixer holds all the measuring items, scoopers, disks for my cookie press, shakers filled with cinnamon and powdered sugar, a few frequently used flavorings and extra yeast. I cook and bake all the time so I frequently put the measuring cup right back in there if I've just scooped out some flour or sugar. This habit drives my sister crazy, who will come to my house and say, "Why are these measuring cups dirty but still in the drawer?" I just figure I'm probably gonna use it again in 30 seconds so why wash it every single time? It's just flour. But every time I do it, I think of her and chuckle. I know. I'm a old granny. (It just occurs to me as I look at this photo that my corn skewers are in here. Are you scratching your head wondering how I incorporate those into my baking ritual? Don't worry. I don't.)



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The clear/acrylic organizers I use in here are from Target and Walmart. The pull out drawer beside that one has cake/cupcake decorating supplies along with cupcake liners and picks,



twine and ribbon, clear plastic bags (for packing up treats to share) and toothpicks.



In the second drawer down, I store all the rest of my supplies, including liquid measuring cups, salt, baking powder, cocoa, baking soda, corn starch, vanilla, cinnamon, corn syrup, etc.

4. Bake with others in mind

It's so easy, while you're baking, to put a few items in a bag for someone else or to bake an extra loaf of bread to give away. I keep different sizes of clear bags on hand, lots of plastic containers, along with aluminum loaf pans, so that I can easily give part of what I make away. I never really understood how much it blesses others to cook for them until our house fire. I got so emotional when people brought food to us. Just the thoughtfulness and soul nourishment of it, not to mention the fact that it fulfills such a basic need. I love that about my Southern heritage. We cook for each other. It's just what we do. My sister is ALWAYS bringing food to people. She's always making twice the amount of food so she can give some away and I want to teach my girls to be the same way. To cook with others in mind. You don't realize how special it is until someone does it for you.

And finally, here's my list of what I stock:

All purpose flour

Whole wheat flour

Cake flour

Wheat bran and germ

Flaxseed meal

White sugar

Brown sugar

Powdered sugar

Cocoa

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Salt

Baking powder

Baking soda

Cream of Tartar

Corn Starch

Corn syrup

Flavorings (real not imitation, if I can get them)

Cinnamon, nutmeg, allspice, cloves, ginger powder

Baking chips of all kinds (chocolate, white chocolate, butterscotch, dark chocolate, chocolate chunk, you get the idea)

Yeast

Shortening

Evaporated milk, condensed milk

Marshmallow cream

Pumpkin puree

Local honey

Dried fruits

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Molasses

Bark chocolate (I love Trader Joe's brand)

Have you ever set up a baking center? Don't you think you use it much more when it's accessible? Even if you can't have a whole space dedicated to baking, rethink your system and see if you can make it easier to use.

Happy baking!

Day 17 Readyng the hearth with prayer



When we were rebuilding our house after the fire, we decided to salvage of few bricks from the old house to use around our hearth.

Because suffering remakes us and we didn't want to forget the winter grace.

We may look *finished* and even *polished* on the outside but we're all a mess. If you look close at the bricks and at our marred hearts, there are burn marks that time won't wash away.

But the scars remind us to pray. They remind us that we are vulnerable and needy and poor and that we must hold tight to the one who burns us with His love but doesn't consume us.

And they remind us to pray for each other too. To see beyond the neat exterior to a heart that longs to be known and loved.

I couldn't have seen it at the time but when He is binding up the brokenhearted, He is teaching the brokenhearted what it means to be loved and how to show that love to someone else.

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And prayer is the perfect way to love someone in advance: *before they come, while you're making the food, and as you fluff the guest room.*

You will learn to love them by praying for them. You will see them differently. You will sympathize with their struggle. You will see clear through and you will tread with reverence on this holy ground.

So, ready the house, yes.

But don't forget that all the important work happens just beyond our sight.

Prayer for the Home:

Lord God, our home is among the most precious gifts we receive in this life.

We realize this all the more as we remember our Lord Jesus. He set aside home and family. Having no place to lay His head throughout His ministry, he chose to sojourn among those He came to save. We prayerfully invite Him to dwell in our earthly abode even as He continually invites us by Word and Sacrament to dwell forever in our heavenly home, which He prepares for us.

Make us ever grateful for this shelter from life's storms.

Keep this house always the home of comfort, joy, peace, and forgiveness.

According to Your will, protect this home from the spiritual assaults of Satan, but likewise make our home a fortress against the calamities of nature and the wickedness of sinful man.

Grant us the virtue of hospitality, the joy of harmonious living, and the blessing of gathering around Your Word and bringing our families' prayers before You.

May all who dwell in our home be blessed by Your presence and Your peace, and may all who go forth give thanks for the grace they receive from You, through us, Your dear children.

*We receive Your loving kindness in our home as a reminder of the eternal home we inherit through Your Son, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray.
Amen.*

(from the Lutheran prayer book)

Day 18 All They Really Need is You



There's no doubt that I love beautiful spaces. When we surround ourselves with truth and beauty, it changes us. Beauty is truth, incarnated. And it is a powerful force in our lives.

It brings me joy to create spaces that make people feel loved. I am purposeful about making a home that is joyful and whimsical and even sultry.

But when I'm making these rooms for my family and friends, it's easy to forget what's really important.

What they really need is me.

And there's no substitute for that. No amount of money or gadgets or gifts or beautiful rooms will make up for my very real presence in their lives.

My children don't really care about their vintage iron beds.

But they need a mother who listens and who treats them with kindness and understanding.

My husband could care less about our custom upholstered antique sofa. But he does need a wife who loves and respects him.

We must repeatedly ask ourselves, "Does this help me serve my family and friends?"

Why are we doing what we do? *To serve others or to impress them.*

Do I want my guests to be wowed by my impeccable hospitality or do I really want to offer my heart to them?

Absolutely none of this matters unless it helps us give ourselves away to others.

It's the Mary/Martha conundrum.

Mary chose the better part.

She chose relationship.

And so should we.

What the people in your life really need you to give to them, above all else, is yourself---your time and love and your willingness to open your heart.

All they really need is you.

Hospitality, at its core, is you, pouring out your life for others.

Day 19 Welcome Gifts

We must constantly remind ourselves of the most important gift we give those in our lives---our very own selves, our time, our heart.

But there are tangible ways we can show that love to our guests.

That brings us to **welcome gifts!**

It's a simple touch that goes a long way in making people feel at home and loved.

My [hospitality board on Pinterest](#) is full of ideas but I'll share a couple of my favorites.

Don't go overboard. This is a small, simple token of friendship and love and need not be expensive or overly formal.

A simple gift, perhaps even handmade, is a great way to let your guests know that you've been anticipating their arrival and that you have thought about them beforehand. I can remember with clarity the times this has been done for me and how special I felt, that someone had been thinking of me.

Note cards, journals, flowers, jam, coffee mugs, and warm socks are all things I've given in the past.

These are all great ideas for gifts, too!

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via (this one may well get diy'ed by my girls very soon!)



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(via, via)

I tend to go in cycles and with seasons for this but for the last year or so my favorite host gift has been the Tervis tumbler. It's perfect for guests that are visiting here because they can use it for hot drinks (fill up with coffee in the morning before antique shopping) or cold drinks (fill with ice water before heading out on the boat). You can fill it with packets of propel powder or crystal light tea mix and then attach a cute little welcome note to the bag. These even make good gifts for men, especially when they have an orange power T on them, in honor of our



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Tennessee Volunteers!

Most importantly, keep it simple and look throughout the year for little things that would make fun gifts so that you're not stressing every time someone comes to visit.

True story:: I bought the Tervis tumblers you see above for our July 4th house guests. I found them two weeks ago in the closet. I'm awesome like that.

Maybe they'll all come back next year and reclaim their rightful tumbler.

p.s. Contrary to the above welcome note, my internet password is not 'Honey Boo Boo Child.' I just thought I should clarify.

Day 20 Setting the Table and Lost Art of Etiquette



IF there's anything I'd love to recover from generations past, it would be the long lost art of etiquette. I own a copy of Amy Vanderbilt's 1950's edition Book of Etiquette and it's quite entertaining to read. There's a chapter in that book dedicated to serving a proper dinner without servants. Without servants? As if there were the options of serving dinner *with servants*.

But there's a beauty in that formal way of living that we've lost. Postmodernism has made everything vulgar or common. There's nothing sacred. Nothing seems worth our best manners and dress and attention. And we would do well to teach our children a better way, a higher calling. And at its essence, etiquette is the perfect way to serve your neighbor, to think of him first, to consider his needs above your own.

Etiquette, when properly used, is the handmaiden of hospitality.

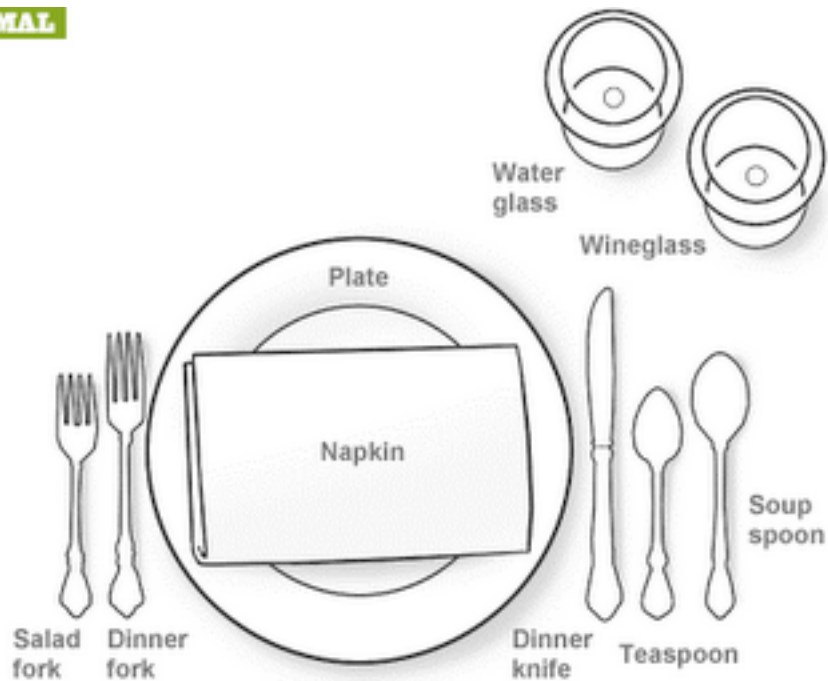
So when I can, I like to infuse these qualities into our dinners, especially around the holidays, and even for our nightly dinners. We set the table, we pray, we sit down, we enjoy ourselves

around the bounty of the food with which we've been blessed. It's our own quiet way to honor the mystery of this eating, to remember the very difficult life processes that must occur for us to break this bread together. Again, the goal is not to impress people, but to serve them. This list will by no means be exhaustive but here are a few things to keep in mind when preparing the table.

1. Learn the proper way to set a table.

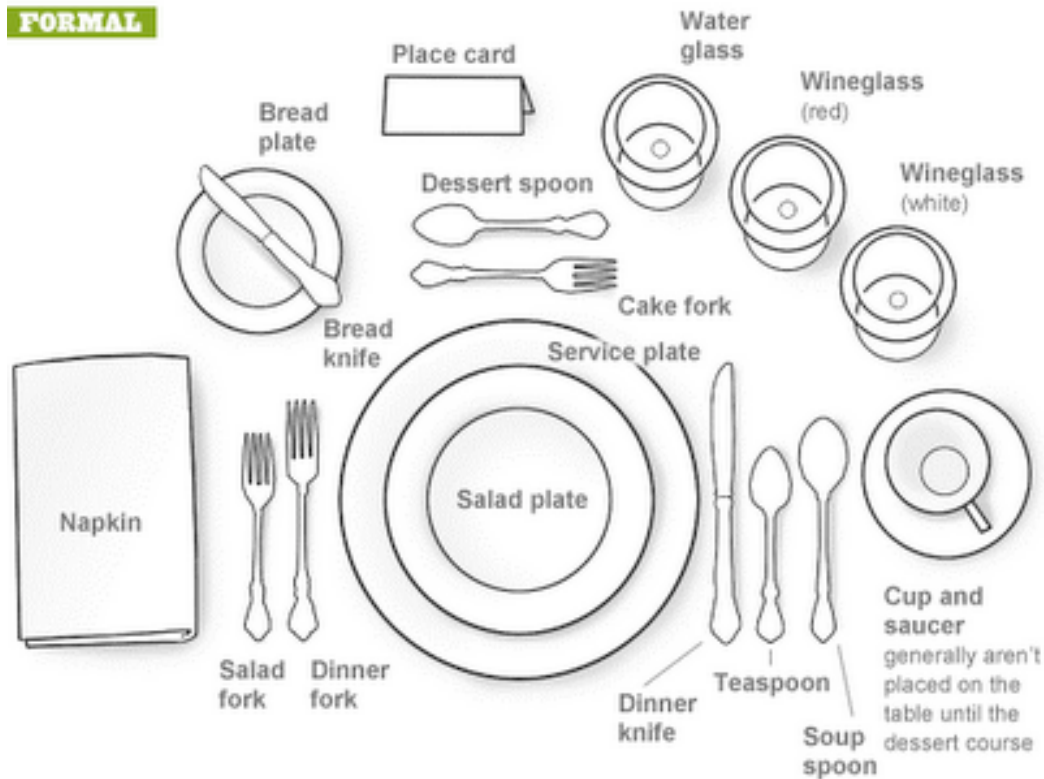
One of the best ways to do this is to print out a sample table setting like this for your children to follow. And let them do it. It's a great way for them to learn----by doing.

INFORMAL



Utensils are placed one inch from the edge of the table

For more formal dinners, you can use this sample.



I recently hosted 34 people for a sit down dinner at Thanksgiving and it was so much fun to let all the kids and young adults help with the table preparations. And all the etiquette classes in the world won't substitute for just doing it over and over.

That's why I make my girls set the table for our family dinners. It's great training for them and it reminds us that the table is a special place, where we give thanks for this nourishing food by slowing down and savoring it, by actually sitting and enjoying this fellowship we have with each other. In our fast paced American lifestyle, we want fast food and dinners on the run. But it's hard to properly return thanks for food that we barely have time to chew. Table etiquette asks us to slow down and make table fellowship a priority.

2. Keep a good selection of linens and napkins on hand.

Let me let you in on a little secret. I don't own a honest to goodness table cloth that fits my table. I have lots of fabric that I fold and tape into place for various occasions and I'm seriously considering making some burlap table cloths for Thanksgiving. I often use craft paper to cover the kids' tables, loaded up with plenty of markers for doodling. But for the most part, I search around the house and try to put something pretty together.

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This table is the perfect example. The off white linen fabric on the table is just 6-7 yards of fabric that I placed in sections over the table. Then, the red geometric fabric was something I bought to recover a stool, which I eventually did, but last year for Thanksgiving, it served as a table runner, just folded in thirds to make the edges look finished.



I loved this colorful tablescape but it hasn't looked quite like that since then. The napkins are mix and matched sets from wherever and the placemats are from West Elm. The dishes are all mixed. I've used all the linens in various combinations all year as the seasons come and go. The non-traditional colors make it easy to transition from season to season.

I took that red fabric earlier this year and finally had a little bench upholstered with it so this Thanksgiving, I actually sewed a tablecloth and some linens. I even limited the color scheme to fuschia, blue and green. I like it so much I may use it for Christmas too!

We entertained so many people for Thanksgiving this year that I decided it'd be much easier to do several different tablescapes so I could just use what I had and not try to buy 34 of the same plates and napkins. And after searching high and low for the perfect shade of pink napkins, I finally bought some fabric at JoAnn's and made a few napkins.

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And every other table looked totally different. It was fun and lively and fresh.

The living room seated the most people so we used the 12 chargers that I already had, with the blue and white plates from Horchow. The 'tablecloths' were just pieces of fabric from Hobby Lobby that we layered over top a king duvet that we pretended was a huge white tablecloth. Necessity really is the mother of invention!



3. Use mostly candles and natural elements for decoration.

This was the adult table several Thanksgivings ago, making good use of votive candles, natural elements, such as pumpkins, and color. I often use fruit and greens clipped from the yard to add some festive touches.



And the kids' table has instant appeal with its markers and craft paper!

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The young adults ate on the porch (it was decently warm this year!) and enjoyed driftwood



and starfish as their table decor.

4. Place cards are the perfect way to personalize your tables.

Make your guests feel right at home with personalized place cards. It's such a simple, inexpensive thing to do but has such a strong emotional impact. Everyone loves to see their name written down. When you see a name card with your name on it, you know that someone thought of you before hand, that someone was anticipating your arrival. And I try to make mine way ahead and then keep extra blank ones handy for unexpected (but always welcome!) visitors.

Sometimes my cards are more elaborate but sometimes, they're nothing more than handwritten names on index cards.

I like to elicit the help of the small ones here. They love to be in charge of making the name cards and they're learning how to make others feel special while they work! For special holidays, I also like to print out my menu too. (Totally unnecessary but often fun!)



Now, go forth and make beautiful tables!

Day 21 On Feeding People well

“Eating with the fullest pleasure is perhaps the profoundest enactment of our connection with the world. In this pleasure, we experience and celebrate our dependence and our gratitude, for we are living from mystery, from creatures we did not make and powers we cannot comprehend.”



The above quote is from Wendell Berry's book, **The Unsettling of America**, and I highly recommend it.

We, as Americans, have lost the art of eating well. And we, as moms, have lost the art of feeding people well. We belittle this task because it seems so menial and repetitive. Or we say to ourselves, “I’m just not a good cook.” I used to say the same thing. And then it dawned on me that these little people I live with are gonna want to eat everyday. And not just everyday, but several times a day. This need for us all to eat is not going anywhere. So I taught myself to cook. I watched Foodtv and cooking videos and read cookbooks and practiced a lot.

If this is an area that you struggle with, I’ve written a 3 part series on my blog that will give you the tools for [developing a long range meal plan](#) (up to a year) so you’ll never wonder what to cook again.

Why is it so important?

Because I really care about these people that I live with everyday and I want to feed them well. We seem to have left the feeding up to the ‘experts’ and we’ve become so distanced from actual food that grows in the ground that we wouldn’t recognize good food even if we saw it. Our prepackaged, precooked, over-processed food has led to a similar superficial lifestyle. Ease of preparation and speed have become our idols. We have forgotten that some things take time, as well they should. Food reminds us that for some things in life, we have to slow down. We need to sit. To savor. To enjoy.

And it’s not just the quality of the food that suffers.

We’ve left the mystery and the sanctity of the table for a lifestyle of running.

But the table has always been a place of rest and soul nourishment.

“The table is the place where you connect and belong. It is a place where the past remains alive in the memory of the very old, and future sparkles with possibility. It is enchanted. We lean close together, we share a glass, we tell a story. Through this simple human relating, the universe feels it is right again.” (Radical Hospitality)

My journey to liturgical christianity has taught me more of this than anything else. The climax of the liturgical service is the meal. Everything builds to communion, the Lord’s supper. For it is here that Christ feeds us His very body and blood for forgiveness and salvation. That life that He won for us on the cross is precious and sacred. And how did He choose to deliver it to us? In a meal. In simple bread and wine. He chose menial, everyday

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items to give us His love and forgiveness. It speaks so powerfully of the mystery of this communion, this eating together.

We are not just filling our bodies when we sit together and eat. This is our *little communion*, if you will. We are learning to live from the profound mysteries of life, to be thankful for this food and to cherish those with whom we share it. I would even venture to say that there is no way to love someone more than to feed them well. Food is powerful and full of mystery and as we prepare a table for others, we are making a place for them in our hearts.

There is a certain mixture of reverence and joy as we break bread together.

We do it in gratitude, to our Father who provides our daily bread and to the hands who have cared enough for us to grow it and prepare it. And if we have failed in this blessed task (as we do daily) then let us come to our Father, who lavishes forgiveness and ask Him to help us see the meal in a new light—to learn to cherish it as He cherishes it and to live in gratitude for this good gift from heaven.

William Carlos Williams said of the meaning of food:

There is nothing to eat,
seek it where you will,
but the body of the Lord.

The blessed plants
and the sea, yield it
to the imagination
intact.

An added note: There are times for all our use when we need to eat on the fly. Trust me, I do it more often than I'd like. I drove through Chick-fil-A last week and as I left there, I had to stop at their trash and throw out the McDonald's from breakfast. The irony is not lost on me. Have mercy! But I think any effort we can make to hallow our table fellowship, to make it special, to cook our own food, is so worth it. It teaches our kids that we think this is so important that we are willing to sacrifice our time to do it. We'll talk more this week about how to take practical steps toward this goal. This is meant to inspire, not to incite guilt. There are seasons in our lives when this is just not possible, trust me, I know. Which is why it's important to feed others when you can. You'll need them to feed you at some point and you'll be so thankful that someone took the time and effort to love you like that. xoxo

Day 22 Tasty Dependable Recipes

In order to feed people well, you need a few fail-safe, perfect every time recipes. I have made it a point to add my favorites to [my blog](#). Maybe my very favorite recipe of all time is my Chipotle Pumpkin Soup. I know----it sounds like a weird combo. But trust me on this one---this recipe is AMAZING. It has layered, rich flavors and is a perfect meal for fall and winter nights. And soup is the perfect thing to make for company along with some good bread. It's cheap, you can make it stretch to feed lots of people and then if you're lucky, there'll be leftovers!



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Here's the recipe:

2 T butter and 2 T. olive oil

1 onion

1 large carrot

3 stalks of celery

3 cloves of garlic

2 boxes of good chicken stock

1 can of pumpkin puree (NOT pumpkin pie mix) the smaller sized can ~14 oz

3 c. cooked chicken or 3 c. diced potatoes for a vegetarian option (could also use frozen hash browns)

1/2 c barley

1/2 t. cinnamon

1/4 t. ginger

1/4 t nutmeg

2-3 T honey

1-2 t. chipotles chopped very fine (it comes in a small can in the mexican section of the store and is packed in a heavy sauce)—it has a lot of heat so be cautious.

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To begin, saute the veggies in the oil and butter until carrots are almost tender. Always salt as you go along and then adjust the salt at the end. Don't wait until the very end to add salt or your dish will lack a depth of flavor. Add garlic after the veggies have cooked about 5 minutes.

Then add chicken stock, pumpkin, chicken, barley and all the spices. Cook at medium to high heat for about 45 minutes to an hour or until barley is tender. Turn heat down to simmer. Add sour cream or yogurt and whisk so that no lumps remain and then add cream. Taste and reseason. I had to add more honey to balance the heat of the chipotles but DON'T leave out the chipotles. The smokey flavor **makes** the soup. It just wouldn't be the same without them! Enjoy!

Day 23 What to Cook When Company Comes



1. Keep a list of great recipes.

The big question is always, “What should I cook?” Isn't that the bane of the existence of every mother? Don't you get tired of trying to figure out what to cook? That's why I started keeping a collection of my favorite recipes on my blog—like a hope chest for my daughters someday. They'll have all mom's recipes at their fingertips. I'm always trying new recipes but there's nothing like a few that are tried and true.

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And what could be better than soup? I call myself the soup whisperer. I LOVE soup. I make it every week, even in the summer. It's comfort food. It feeds a crowd. You can make it stretch. It's not expensive. Soup is your friend when you're having company.

Here are some more of my trusty favorites. If you're viewing these on a pdf, visit my blog, at [**http://lifeingraceblog.com/recipes**](http://lifeingraceblog.com/recipes) to find a full listing of them all.

[My Big Fat Greek Goulash](#)

[Best Beef Stew Ever](#)

[Mocha Cake](#)

[The Lightest Fluffiest Angel Wing Biscuits](#)

[Beef Enchiladas](#)

[Best Ever Chocolate Chip Cookie Recipe](#)

[Glazed Apple Bars](#)

[Irish Stew](#)

[Southern Cornbread](#)

[Spicy Tomato Soup](#)

[Fish Tacos](#)

[Old Fashioned Griddle Cakes](#)

[Blueberry Coffee Cake](#)

[Strawberry Dream Cake](#)

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Late Summer Vegetable Soup

Chicken and Dumplings

Cheese Tortellini Soup

Grannie's Fudge

Chipotle Pumpkin Barley Soup

Rocky Top Chili

Italian Sub Soup

Cheeseburger {in paradise} Soup

Taco Casserole

Cherry Chocolate Chip Cookies with Sea Salt

Potato Corn Chowder

Roasted Zucchini Lasagna

2. Plan ahead.

Make a menu. Right it down. When I'm having company, I plan every meal ahead and plan for plenty of snacks, cocktails, cookies, etc. I plan for things that can be at least partially prepared ahead. This allows you plenty of margin—which translates into time, to visit with your company.

3. Cook ahead.

Almost everything can be frozen. I cook ahead and then freeze what freezes well. Soups freeze particularly well as do cookies. I almost always have those things in my freezer, just in case.

4. Make homemade bread.

I always try to bake bread when company's coming. The house smells amazing and everyone knows how much you love them. The end.

5. Know when it's time to order out and just enjoy your guests.

Without a doubt, your guests want to visit with you. They'd rather have simple food, even take-out, and get to visit with you, rather than have you fussing around all evening about the food preparations. Don't stress yourself out. This is about serving others by your presence---not your stressed out, frazzled, distracted self. Know your limits and listen to them!

Day 24 Chocolate Chip Cookies



If I've made this recipe once, I've made it a hundred times. They always turn out perfect. Always. Every. single. time. Your guests and your family will love you forever. And then they'll ask for the recipe.

I've written about this recipe before but I had to include it in my hospitality book. This chocolate chip cookie recipe is absolutely my most requested one. And trust me when I say that I've made more versions of the chocolate chip cookie any one woman should. My wonderful friend Kimmy introduced me to these delicious cookies and I am so thankful and indebted to her for sharing it with us. My sister now makes these cookies all the time and they recently won "Best Dessert Award" at her church's Super Bowl party. These cookies took down some serious cakes and pies to win the prize. And here's why I like them so much: 1) They have the best taste and texture. 2) They are just as good on day 4 as on day 1. 3) They freeze very well. 4) They turn out perfect EVERY. SINGLE. TIME. Oh wait, I said that!

They never disappoint. Ever. And the best news yet? They never flatten out on the pan.

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But they're just that good. Without further adieu, I give you the **chocolate chip cookie** of all chocolate chip cookies.

2 sticks butter, softened

1 cup of vegetable oil

1 egg

1 cup of white sugar

1 cup of brown sugar

1 t. baking soda

1 t. cream of tartar

1 t. baking powder

1 t. salt

2 t. vanilla

4 1/2 cups of flour

1 12 oz bag of semi-sweet chocolate chips

1 T. milk

Cream butter, sugars, and egg until fluffy. Add the rest of the ingredients and mix well. For best results, use a scooper to scoop cookies onto cookie sheet. Bake at 350 for 9-10 minutes until the edges are slightly browned. This recipe makes 4-5 dozen cookies depending on what size you make them.

Day 25 Potato Corn Chowder



Okay, humor me with one more recipe?! And a soup, no less. I love this one because it uses such simple ingredients and yet, is packed with flavor and texture.

Plus, I'm a huge fan of one pot meals. One pot meals make life worth living. Okay, maybe that's overstating it but still.

One pot to clean=one happy momma.

This corn chowder is so easy, so delicious, and is even a crowd pleaser among the youngsters.

Here's what you need:

1 onion

1 32 oz bag frozen corn (could certainly use fresh corn when it's in season but the frozen works great too)

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1/2 to 1 red pepper, diced

1 stalk of celery, diced

3 yukon potatoes, peeled and diced

3-4 springs of thyme

salt and pepper

cayenne pepper

2 boxes of chicken stock

2 T. flour

1 T. bacon fat

1 T. butter

1 T. olive oil

1/2 c. heavy cream

1 T. honey

Melt the butter and bacon fat in a large stock pot and then add the olive oil. When the oils are hot, add the chopped onion, red pepper and celery. Add a pinch of cayenne pepper and then salt and pepper. You'll reseason at the end but make sure you start the process now for depth of flavor. (I always buy celery that still has the leaves on the end and then chop those too and add them along with the celery.) I cook these on med high so that the onions will brown a little. When those have sautéed for 4-5 min, add the flour and cook it about a minute and then add all the chicken stock, along with the frozen corn. Add the thyme (you can either put the whole stems with the leaves on them and then remove the stems at the end or pull the leaves off the stems and just add the leaves) and potatoes and cook for 30 min on med heat

until the potatoes are tender. When they are tender, add the honey and cream and then reseason as needed. Since there aren't many seasonings in this soup, I add lots of pepper. Enjoy the some crusty bread!

Ode to bacon fat

Also, the bacon adds a lot of flavor so don't skip that step. (I know my Southern friends won't but if you're from Connecticut, you'll be tempted.) Bacon fat rules the world. Corn chowder just isn't corn chowder without bacon fat. I am not me without bacon fat. Love your family well. Use bacon fat. Amen.

Day 26 The Gracious Hostess

“Culture yourselves, I pray you. Live on the great thoughts which expand the soul and charge the being with forcefulness, and eschew utterly the wretched stuff out of which so many girls are building up flabby-tissued brains. Enrich your nature with true art. Busy your days with better preparation for your future position than the frivolous play of society, which wastes the energies and belittles the stature of womanhood. Above all, see that you live in open-souled up-look to the Father, the Source and Fount of all high life, in fellowship with the Son, the pattern and exemplar of all nobleness of human form, and in communion of that Spirit of Holiness who ever moveth in you all pure, true pulses, the Lord and giver of Life.”



You know those intriguing, interesting people that you could talk to for hours about a host of subjects and never tire of their stimulating company? I know, there aren't many of those kind left in the world. Hence, my point.

Make it your goal to cultivate those traits in yourself and in your children.

Easy to say. Difficult to do. But here's a start.

1. Read good books.

By far, the most interesting people are those who are widely read. Because most of us who grew up in America in the past fifty years have had subpar educations and we did not grow up reading the best books.

I've been interested in classical education for the past 15 years and have been on a quest to read the best classic works of literature. Everyone has their own list of the best books but if I made a list of the 10 books that everyone should read, my list would look like this.

1. [The Odyssey \(Penguin Classics\)](#), 2. [Confessions \(Oxford World's Classics\)](#), 3. [The Divine Comedy \(Oxford World's Classics\)](#) 4. [Paradise Lost](#) 5. [Orthodoxy](#) 6. [Mere Christianity Gift Edition](#) 7. [The Great Divorce](#) 8. [Hamlet \(Arden Shakespeare: Third Series\)](#) 9. [The Brothers Karamazov \(Dover Thrift Editions\)](#) 10. [The Unsettling of America: Culture & Agriculture](#)

It's a good start to communing with the greatest minds that ever lived.

Start with The Odyssey. After this list, you'll never be the same!

I also have an [classical online bookclub](#) to help you get started if the thought of classic books makes you want to jab sharp objects into your eardrums.

2. Put your guest's needs first.

Think about what you might need if you were in their shoes. Show interest in them. Ask them questions about their life, show interest in what they're doing. We are all so self-centered that this takes practice. But the more you do, it the more natural it becomes!

Day 27 Gratitude unlocks hospitality



I posted this picture on my blog and wrote, “***When gratitude hovers like fire.***”

If you know my story, you know that my family and I survived a tragic house fire that left us with nothing but the clothes on our backs.

As we stood in our driveway and watched everything we’d worked so hard to build crumble to the ground, I wasn’t sure I’d ever recover. That cold, December morning will live in my memory forever and it took months of grieving all the losses but soon I began to feel the ground shift. I began to see a hard truth emerge from those ashes.

If I can’t learn to see him here, in this mess, to give thanks for even this, maybe I’ll never know the depths of His grace. It’s easy to say thank you when there’s abundance. But what about when it’s all gone. Can I learn to see the gift in the dark? When hope seems so far away.....

So I open my hands and take what He gives, in faith, that He will twist it all into mercy.

Gratitude washes like rain. It hovers in miraculous ways.

Gratitude opens my eyes to my abundance---and from that perspective, I'm able to see my neighbor's need.

Gratitude makes hospitality possible.

Day 28 The Well Appointed Hostess

“The virtuous woman is a woman of strength, forceful goodness, which energizes her into usefulness and sweetens her into graciousness---altogether a ‘woman of faculty’, strong minded, skillful-handed, gentle-hearted, sweet-spoken, graceful-mannered, courteous, wise and noble, a lady by divine ranking, housekeeper and homemaker; concerning whom, if you happen to know any such, “her price is above rubies.”

Y'all listen close. There is no amount of makeup or clothing or hair products that can ever make up for the beauty that lives within you. You are beautiful! Did you hear me? God has made you in His image and He has poured Himself into you and you are unique and special and lovely in all the ways that matter.

But there are a few principles I follow when dressing myself that might help you too. Take it all with a grain of salt because I've always been a little outrageous and risky with my wardrobe.

1. Find clothes that are ‘yank and tuck and hitch free’.

And by that I mean, who's got time to keep readjusting clothes that don't fit properly? Noone in the history of ever. So as much as you and I both hate it, *try things on* to make sure you're not gonna be hitching and tucking and yanking and in general driving yourself to the brink of insanity. And we all may have gone too far in rebelling against mom jeans. It may be time to give up the teeny bopper jeans that won't stay up. Which brings me to my next point.

2. Invest in some good jeans.

Okay, I want you to go right now to your closet and count how many pairs of jeans you have. Go on, I'll wait. How many was it? 10? 15? More than 20? Don't lie to me. Do any of them really fit? If you're like most women, the answer is no.

Now, if you could sell or trade in all those ill-fitting jeans for one pair of amazing, butt-lifting, perfect fitting jeans, wouldn't you do it? How much would you pay for one pair of awesome jeans? Well, it's gonna cost you. But save your pennies and put it on your 'list of things I must do'---buy some good jeans. My favorite pair is from True Religion and they were VERY expensive. I like Seven jeans and Hudson's and Paige jeans. Go to a high-end department store and try on some good jeans. Just do it. You won't regret it, I promise.

3. Buy every color of Sugar Lips tank top you think you'll use.

[These tank tops](#) are one size fits all, they fit amazingly well and have a lot of 'stretch' in them. They stay put and help you feel all tucked in. I wear one every single day. I don't ever want to talk to you about any other tank top, ever! These are amazing and pretty cheap. Buy yours today. Don't delay. You'll be singing my praises.

4. Dress like a woman.

Do not underestimate the power of a good wrap dress. Dresses are beautiful and feminine and can hide a lot of buttercream icing indiscretion. I LOVE dresses and wear them all the time. They're not just for Sunday. Dress them down with cowboy boots or flip flops. I love this wrap dress and wear it in the summer by itself with flip flops or in the winter with a shirt,



sweater and boots.

5. *Do not buy 'outfits'.*

Buy individual pieces that you love but resist buying things as 'outfits'. Buy some good jeans, a few great sweaters, some girly blouses and a few great wrap dresses. Outfits are so 1985. I have such bad memories of outfits. I almost always had matching shoes to go with my outfits back then. The clothes shouldn't be married to each other. It must be outlawed.

6. *Learn what looks good on you and what doesn't.*

Why did this take me 37 years to learn? I do not know. But I've finally figured it out. I can't wear flat shoes or peasant blouses or empire dresses. I don't look good in boxy sweaters or long skirts or high waisted anything. I have a boyish shape so I have to do things to give the illusion of a more feminine figure. I look good in blouses but not so good in turtlenecks.

The bottom line is----you need to find your lists of do's and don't and abide by it. Stop trying to force things that aren't good for you just because they're on sale. Think of the things you feel great in and try to deconstruct what it is about those pieces that you love.

7. *Buy fewer things but better things.*

We all have way too many clothes. We buy things because they're on sale but then complain that we don't have things to wear that we really like. Be patient. If there's nothing this season that thrills you, just wait and save your money. Invest in a few really awesome classic pieces and then try out a few trendy things when they're on sale. Buy less, but better.

8. *Remember why you should care*

We should take some pride in our appearance for the sake of our husbands. They are visual creatures and they are drawn to beauty. We love and serve them by taking care of ourselves and trying to be the best we can be. We aren't trying to win beauty contests, nor are we trying to be 20 years younger. But we are trying. It's important. And trust me, they notice.

I spend 90% of my time in good jeans with colorful, girly shirts. Add some cowboy boots and it's an easy, comfortable way to spend the day and feel good about myself. I want to be pleasing for my husband so that to the best of my ability, the outside represents the beauty that God is cultivating in me on the inside.

Day 29 The Paradox of it all



This photo was taken 2 weeks before our house burned to ground in the middle of the night. If anyone saw this photo on my blog, they might have thought that this was the picture of a family that has it all. This is the epitome of the blessed life.

If so, then how do you explain the heap of ruins we stood in two weeks later?

This is not the picture of 'having it all.'

If I learned anything from being a christian, it's this—life is full of beautiful paradox.

Nothing is as it seems.

The first shall be last.

You must die to live.

Lose your life to find it.

Give and you shall receive.

And so it is with hospitality. I'm the host of this series, the 'host', if you will, of this ebook. I pay the publishing fees, I write the content, I take the pictures, I 'set the table'—and then I invite you all to come to here and be my guests.

But guess who reaps most of the blessings from opening this 'home' to you?

I do.

Writing this work, this labor of love, has been life-changing and life-giving for me.

Because of those who loved me and accepted me and encouraged me, I have a better understanding of myself. I am more 'me' because of opening myself to people like you.

I understand my gifts, my weaknesses, and my prejudices better . People just like you have helped me to know myself. If I am reaching my potential as a writer, mother and wife, it is partially because of you.

So don't approach hospitality with some misguided sense that 'poor so-and-so' needs your love and acceptance. Enter into hospitality because ***you need it most of all.***

I have written this series with much anguish and emotion, not because I can't think of what to say but because I can't decide what to leave out.

Kathleen blessed me so when she said, "You've found your sweet spot in this series."

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And if I've found my sweet spot, it's because of you. Because you have helped me to see.

C.S. said, "I do not write to be understood, I write to understand."

And isn't it so with all of us? The things we're most passionate about are the things we're wrestling with and struggling to understand.

I don't have it all figured out but as I write and you respond and encourage, the truth shines in my heart. I begin to grasp the beautiful tension that exists in every true thing.

Hospitality blesses people, for sure. But none more than the host.

So, thank you, for ushering in this treasure trove of blessings.

I am most humbled and grateful.

Day 30 On listening and margin

“When we listen to another, we catch a slight glimpse of their soul. We create an open page where they are free to write their story. We help people remember who they are.”

If there is one gift you can give another human being, it is a listening heart. Nothing validates us, makes us whole, helps us become who we are meant to be, as much as to be heard.

But we don't listen well, do we? We are busy, distracted, stressed, overworked, overburdened, anxious, and selfish.

We don't listen because we don't have space for others.

Our lives are chaotic and cluttered and full.

We lack margin. We don't know how to quieten the buzz. We don't really even want to.

But when we lose margin, we lose our humanity.

Margin is the space between us and our limits. It's what gives us the time and compassion to listen.

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Margin gives us time to play.....



time to paint pumpkins.....



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time to learn to crochet.....



time to bake cupcakes....



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time to be sisters.....

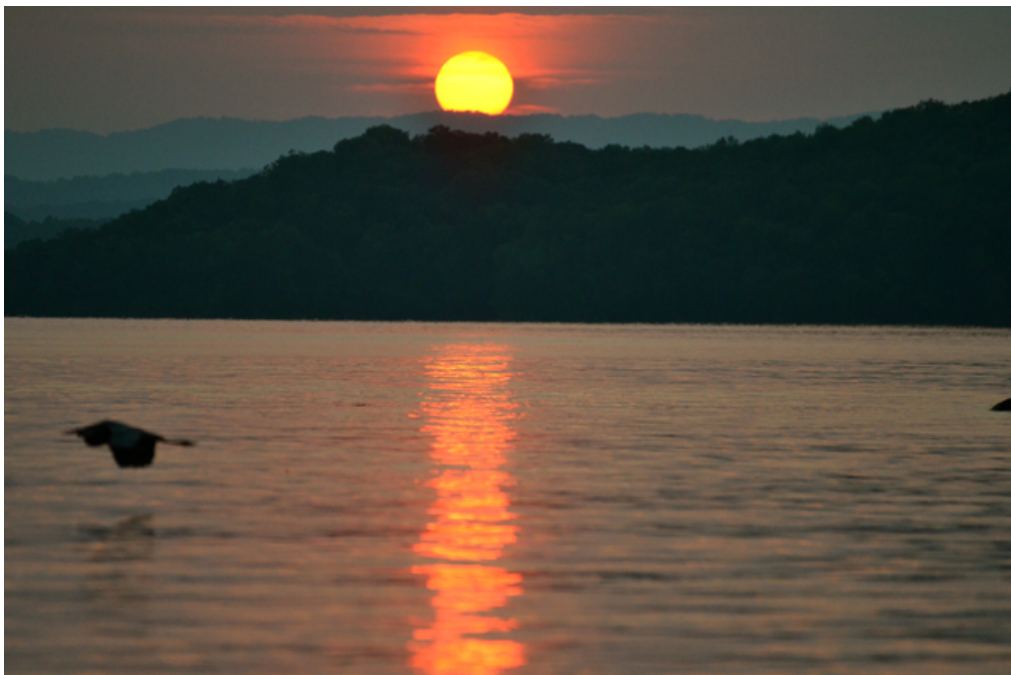


The margin of our lives is where the garden grows...



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and the sun sets.....



It's where we learn to stargaze and bird watch.



31 DAYS TO A HEART OF HOSPITALITY

It's where we sing and dance.....



31 DAYS TO A HEART OF HOSPITALITY

It's where we linger to feel the magic of the everyday.



It's where we remember so keenly that these moments are fleeting.....



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It gives us the space to breathe.....



To read.....



Or even nap....



Maybe every good thing that happens, happens here, on the sidelines, in the space between us and our schedules.

And we miss it because we haven't learned to listen.
Because we've made lives with no margin. No room for what might be. No room for the soul to breathe.

And this place, as you might have guessed is where hospitality lives. In the margins. Where we make room for others and their beautiful struggle.

31 DAYS TO A HEART OF HOSPITALITY

Where we learn to really listen—to incline our hearts to someone else.

So, my question for you is this?

Is there any room between you and your limits?

Are you exhausted? Always on the verge of tears? Spent? Irritable? Lacking joy?

You need margin. And you may have to fight for it.

I gave my family the gift of margin when I quit working.

And everytime I am willing to stop and listen and care.

To slow down. To learn to say no to all the noise. To stay home. To choose the path less traveled.

But it's not natural in our modern world so I fight for it everyday.

And some days I fail miserably.

But some days.....

I see it. I hear the beautiful symphony of life. I hold onto joy and I listen well, like my life depends on it.

And I'm starting to wonder if maybe, in some ways, it does.

I recommend this book if you long to create space in your life. Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives

Day 31 What About all those ordinary days?

“In His incarnation, Christ has knit creation back together and sanctified our flesh, our mundane. He has redeemed for us all the ‘actual textures of physical life’ and granted us the ‘full extent of the mysteries of the incarnation and all that flows from it, and all that make our mortal life fruitful once more.’”

“The incarnation took all that properly belongs to our humanity and delivered it back to us, redeemed. All of our inclinations and appetites and capacities and yearnings are purified and gathered up and glorified by Christ. He did not come to thin out human life; He came to set it free. All the dancing and feasting and processing and singing and building and sculpting and baking and merrymaking that belong to us, and that were stolen away into the service of false gods, are returned to us in the gospel.”

*(both quotes by Thomas Howard in **Evangelical is Not Enough**)*

Sometimes, after a weekend or a holiday with lots of feasting and guests, it's hard to readjust my heart back to ordinary days and all the ordinary demands they bring.

You know the list. Laundry, cooking, dishes, schooling, errands, bills, parenting, stress! It's quite noble work but it's so easy to despise it. To wish it away while daydreaming about grandiose plans and schemes.

Today, I choose to relish it.

I hold the laundry tight and inhale extra long and think about the love that is modeled when a woman washes the same clothes over and over, day in, day out. It almost seems to touch something sacred—this washing and consecrating of materials things for a noble and good purpose. The renewal that comes from being clean. My heart aches for that washing too. Perhaps it's a blessed thing, this daily rhythm of life. We love the grand scale, the best days, the shiny things. The bright newness of God's blessed restoration.

But what about all those ordinary days? Where is God then?

He always chooses the ordinary things to do his greatest work.

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He chose bread to feed us. Water to wash us. A baby to save us.

He is no despiser of the small days.

It is in them that we see the key to life.

Not in falling in love but in loving everyday, with clean socks and warm soup.

Not in that one blissful day of childbirth but in the birth of each day, one a time, where the daily routine teaches us to depend on our Father, who has made no provision for tomorrow—but only today, in this daily bread.

Perhaps this thing I've come to dread—this daily drudgery—is in fact my greatest teacher, in disguise.

Teaching me to live in this moment. With these children. And this sacred work. It's really all there is.

Today is the day of salvation.

So, I hold on tightly to little hands. And I stir the soup. And I fold the towels.

And I say thank you for this work, this calling.

For the chance to pour out my most precious gifts to those I live with everyday.

Hospitality is not for special occasions. It's a way of life. A way of living that turns everything upside down---

Hospitality is not about inviting people into our perfect homes, but inviting them into our imperfect hearts.

Hospitality is for this blessed ordinary day—where grace and mercy rain down and turn water into wine, drudgery into vocation, and curse into blessing.

About the Author



After leaving her career as a family physician in 2006, Edie has found her sweet spot, her life's work, at home. Like her favorite Greek hero, Odysseus, her homecoming has been full of joys and trials and plenty of hard work—as she has seeks to live a full, authentic and creative life with her family. She cooks and cleans and homeschools and gardens and crafts and reads and dabbles in bird-watching and star gazing. She's obsessed with cowboy boots, banjos, monograms and cornbread, and is Southern to the core. Her faith journey has had similar twists and turns as she has struggled through legalism and mysticism to finally find her true home in the orthodox christian faith, where the grace of God in Christ, has become her life's manifesto. She documents her faith journey, her insatiable appetite for classic literature, her love for C.S. Lewis, her obsession with art and design, and her Southern chic decorating style

on her blog, [life{in}grace](#). She was recently featured in January's issue of Better Homes and Gardens, after her family rebuilt their home and life following a devastating house fire. She writes with wit, passion, and honesty, and hopes to inspire women to love and care for their homes and families, despite the often despairing hardships that life often brings.

Okay, one more recipe, how about it?

Edie calls herself the Soup Whisperer and dreams of publishing her own cookbook, bearing that name!

She's especially proud of this one!



Spicy Tomato Soup {with a hint of blue cheese}

don't let the blue cheese scare you. this is the best tomato soup recipe i've ever eaten. ever. just ask stevie.

he won't lie for me just to promote my tomato soup.



Now, if I've already offended you with the suggestion of blue cheese, don't get your panties in a ruffle.

You just use a little—for a complex layer of flavors—and I highly doubt you could tell it had blue cheese in it, if you didn't already know.

Try it and you could always substitute the cheese if you have serious issues with blue cheese.

The other two stars of the show are **sriracha and a large can of cento tomatoes.**

Sriracha is a deliciously-hot-addictive sauce that has seductive powers unlike any hot sauce you've ever had. Your mouth might burn but it will not stop you from adding more. A little squirt into soup makes all the difference!

You'll need these ingredients:

a few splashes of olive oil

1 small onion

2-3 cloves of garlic

1 28 ounce can of tomatoes

1 14 ounce can of diced tomatoes

1 cup chicken broth

2 T. honey

1 small squirt of sriracha (more if you like really spicy—but start small)

handful of basil leaves

about an ounce of blue cheese (or your favorite easy melt cheese)

1/3 cup of cream

kosher salt and pepper to taste

You'll also need a submersion blender!

The directions:

In a large dutch oven, add a few tablespoons of olive oil. Don't measure, just swirl a few times. Then add the chopped onion and garlic and salt to taste and then saute for about 5 minutes. Add the tomatoes in their juice. Then add the rest of the ingredients except the cream and let it simmer for about 10 minutes. Use your submersion blender to achieve the consistency you'd like and then add cream. Taste it and reseason as necessary. I almost always have to add more salt and more honey.

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And if you accidentally go heavy on the sriracha, add a little more cream to balance the heat. Serve with [artisan bread](#) or crackers and prepare to be lavished with ” mmmm’s” and gratitude.

Garnish with basil and enjoy!

